

S1 D13 / Pang / mysterious postcard -- RCL work day

Union Pang struggled to discern the intended threat of the small laminated card lodged in the closed front door of her newspaper building. Whomever shoved the card into the crack of the closed door knew a great deal about her. It occurred to her that the historical society of her hometown might have placed the card overnight.

She unlocked the door and walked into the foyer of her alternative weekly Richmond City Limits. Pang dreaded the stressful Tuesday production full of the hard work of putting the paper out for the week. Pang arrived at her office and put the card on her desk.

The sender knew how important the late John Lennon was to her on a personal basis. They also knew enough about her to know she was obsessed with something from her childhood. It did not take a lot of thought to realize they were alluding to The Old Free State.

Pang wondered if something had changed about the newspaper once owned by her family. She usually learned important information about it through her ex-husband who had relocated to Coleburn in the last few years.

The Old Free State served a community of a few thousand souls. But the publication had a huge emotional significance to her. Ownership of that community newspaper was existential to Pang. Earning the means to own the paper was the basis of her success. She would die to own the paper if need be.

Her attention turned to other things on her desk. The Richmond City Limits office cat Mouthy purred between the two monitors on her desktop. She leaned over and rubbed the cat. She eyed a Ms. Magazine that featured her picture on the cover. She was proud that many within the feminist community saw her as a Third Wave Feminist icon. Pang was well aware of how risky some of her recent professional decisions were.

Pang ran the business side of the paper as publisher. But she was known to take a hands-on approach to content when she saw fit. It was still early morning when she sat in on one last editorial meeting for the week.

The focus of the meeting was putting the final touches on the cover story. This week the paper focused on an eccentric from nearby Ashland. The newspaper wanted to expand into regional coverage. The proposed cover of the paper was a close up of the man with the caption, "Is This Man Crazy?"

Pang had a quick discussion with the newspaper's editor about when they planned to put content on the Website that the newspaper hosted. Pang decided to wait 24 hours before putting stories for the week on the site.

At lunchtime, she changed into her workout clothes and headed to a modest gym and firing range. Pang was proud to provide this perk for her staff. Her secret motive for its construction was a fear of the potential chaos caused by the Century Date Problem. Those concerns led her to learn to shoot a gun and take up Taekwondo.

Pang squeezed off a few rounds with her Glock before an intense workout. She again thought about the card and its potential meaning. Pang did not like how rattled she was by something as innocuous as a card.

The cryptic message of the card put her on edge. She did not like that someone would take the trouble to put such a card in her door overnight. How they knew that she would be the one to find it also unnerved her.

It would be just like the Coleburn Historical Society to put a threatening postcard in the crack of the closed front door of her newspaper. The group was not violent in Pang's experience. But they were known to play mind games in pursuit of their goals.

Pang thought about her own goals for the rest of day. Tonight was different because of a hot date. That Andrew Denton was willing to be seen in public with her piqued her interest. Denton was the CEO of Landpark Media. His company was in a long-term newspaper war with Media General, the owner of The Richmond Times-Dispatch.

There were lingering rumors that Landpark was interested in buying Richmond City Limits. Pang worried her ex-husband David Mohlenhoff might crash her date. Mohlenhoff was known to show up at Pang's Fan district apartment so wasted that she was amazed he managed to drive there without killing himself.

She hoped to get lucky. She had not gotten laid in ages and she needed the release. She returned to her office at the paper. At closing time Pang stood up from her desk. On her way out the door Pang was buttonholed by an attractive young woman who wanted a job at the nearby club she owned.

“I’m heading towards Gaze right now,” Pang said. “Walk with me there.”

They headed into the chilly night air towards her destination a short jaunt away. A sign for a club grew larger in her field of vision in the dark. Pang opened the staff entrance with her key. Her ownership of a stripclub was the source of great controversy within the Virginia publishing industry. Her conservative detractors called her a hypocrite to advocate feminism while owning a strip club.

The door opened to a stripper changing room. A large mirror with a series of stations to sit at covered the length of one wall. Lockers for girls to store their street clothes were available. A number of shower stalls were also built into the room.

They made their way through the club. Pang debated doing a little stripping later in the evening. She needed to let off more steam. She was still stressed and tense from production at Richmond City Limit.

“Just sit here at the bar and I’ll come get you in a moment,” Pang told the woman.

Pang checked on girls as she walked around the club and occasionally eavesdropped on conversations. She waved to the club DJ. Pang helped herself to a Coke at the bar. Pang then turned to look at a stripper named Bleu working the pole on stage.

She walked towards the front of the stage. She showered the stripper with dollar bills. She slipped a \$20 inside the stripper’s g-string. She waved at the club manager on her way to her office. Once there, she went over receipts. Pang glanced at a dozen small monitors connected to CCTVs strategically positioned all around the strip club. The club’s provocative 1995 calendar was on her desk, waiting to be put up.

On a board next to her was a small bawdy magnet that purported to show the different types of breasts. Pang sat down and flipped through the most recent Playboy Magazine with her on the cover. Pang posed for a semi-nude pictorial in conjunction with an interview. The publication of the pictorial left her son aghast. She promised him to stop stripping completely to make it up to him -- even just to relax.

She opened a desk drawer. Pang pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels. Pang claimed to be a decade sober. But she continued to fall off the wagon. Her lingering drinking problem was one of her most tightly-held secrets.

Pang gulped down a double of booze. The warmth of the alcohol warmed her body. Pang realized the meaning of the postcard. She pulled the postcard out to study it again. The card warned her to steer clear of The Old Free State.

She again wondered if something had changed with the newspaper. She had long sought to own the paper. Pang made a point of talking to its current owner whenever she came into Coleburn to pick up her son from Blackstone Military Academy.

Pang returned before going to fetch the young woman who wanted to strip at Gaze. She noticed a familiar movement in one of the CCTV monitors next to her desk.

It was Mohlenhoff.